

The Standard-Examiner Sunday Feature Section

Puzzling Mystery of Mrs. Russell's "Dream Baby"



Is the Husband She Charges Was a "Sleep-Walking Lover" Really the Father of the Child He Denies?

Gay young Mrs. Russell and her nine-months-old son whose fatherhood is a matter of dispute in the most sensational divorce suit the English courts have ever seen

Mrs. Russell told the court in all seriousness that her husband walked in his sleep. One night, while in a somnambulist's trance, she said, he made his way to her room and broke the unnatural promises they had made at the time of their marriage.

"He walked in his sleep!" Such was the amazing explanation of her "dream baby" offered by Mrs. Christabel Hart Russell, when her husband, John Hugo Russell, heir to Lord Amptill, accused her of infidelity and denied the paternity of her child, now nine months old. It was because of John Hugo Russell's somnambulist habits, she alleged, that he failed to realize the fact of his fatherhood and was so ready to deny it under oath.

Never before in the history of jurisprudence has such a defense been set up, and all Britain is gasping and wondering how the mystery will ever be cleared up.

The court which heard the case threw up its collective hands and decided that it was no Solomon and could not render any judgment upon the amazing evidence presented by both sides.

First of all, the parties to the suit must be identified. Russell's grandfather, Odo Russell, was British Ambassador to Germany in 1877 and with Lord Beaconsfield (D'Israeli) negotiated the Treaty of Berlin which gave Romania and Herzegovina to Austria and in the course of time indirectly precipitated the world war of 1914. Russell's father, Lord Amptill, was a member of the famous Oxford crew of 1890. Mrs. Russell comes from a military background. Before the war she studied in Paris and became a familiar figure in the gay Latin Quarter. During the war she was employed by the government and evinced such ability that soon a private concern made her a handsome offer and she assumed a post of considerable responsibility. She is tall and fair to look upon and—let the court records call the unusual tale.

Russell met Miss Hart when he was 21 and a member of a submarine crew. She was two years his senior and many years older in experience. They met in 1916 and became engaged in December 1917. In January Russell received a letter from his fiancée announcing the breaking of the troth. He discovered that one of her friends, now named in the case as a co-respondent, Gilbert Murray Bradley, had caused the wrecking of his romance.

He appealed to Bradley to play fair, and it was agreed that the decision between the two men should be left with Miss Hart. She selected Bradley and the twins disappeared. Three months later Russell met her, fell in love all over again and on October 18, 1918, they were married.

They agreed that they should lead the lives of celibates and that Mrs. Russell should be a wife in name only! For a time, it appears, all was harmony under these strange conditions of married life. But later on Mrs. Russell, tired of the ways of Bohemia, rebelled against the peculiarities of her husband, and, according to the testimony introduced in the recent court proceedings, went to the Continent. There she had a "just so lovely a time." In a letter from Switzerland, Mrs. Russell wrote:

"Your wife has a vast following of adoring young men, who fight each other for the pleasure of dancing with her. There are Greeks and slim silky Argentinians. . . . Also a professional dancer, with whom I do tangoes every night."

"I have four young men in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry: they are priceless and so naughty; and so is your wife."

"I am so much in love with my young man. His hair is beautifully marcelle-waved, his clothes fit

John Hugo Russell dressed up in one of the women's costumes he is said to be fond of wearing

him like a glove, and he has a lovely hand."

Very naturally Russell grew peeved and jealous and so he began to have his wife watched. The result, as told in court, showed that she spent several nights in Bradley's apartment, and that she went to Paris with Lionel M. Cross, also named as co-respondent.

In his testimony Russell related that his wife had two latchkeys, one to her husband's apartment and the other to her mother's. One morning, after his wife had been out all night, Russell testified that Bradley had called up on the phone and had stated frankly that she had spent the night at his bachelor quarters, having mislaid the key to her mother's home.

On another occasion she went to a dance with Bradley and Cross and did not return at all the next morning. What happened is best described in the husband's own words:

"I telephoned the police and then came a telephone from Mr. Bradley saying that she had spent the night there. When I got to his flat she was occupying the only bed and said that Bradley spent the night sitting in a chair or resting on the sofa. Apart from three occasions, I cannot recall my wife ever spending a night there."

Perhaps the most incriminating testimony was in Mrs. Russell's own handwriting, in the shape of a letter to Miss Maud Acton, a popular English actress, reading in part:

"Of course, Stills may make up a thousand things against me without going an inch out of his way. Every week-end I have been with George Cross. And Gilbert, at whose flat I stayed one night because I lost my key."

"G. had to go out and phone for Stills to bring me some clothes in the morning. I have been so indiscreet that he has enough evidence to divorce me once a week."

In her defense, however, Mrs. Russell

denied any impropriety. Although not a wife, except in name, yet she swore she had been true to her marriage vows. And then came her startling excuse for the baby, whose fatherhood was questioned. The "dream baby," as the child has been known since her mother made her astonishing explanation of the manner of its origin, was born on October 15, 1921. Russell denied under oath that he had ever broken his celibate's vow. He denied the child's legitimacy, which

carries with it the title of Lord Amptill. He swore that he was not the child's father. And then Mrs. Russell set up her defense:

"He walked in his sleep!" As related by her in all seriousness and as received by the court with gasps of amazement, her story was that Russell was a "sleep-walking lover." One night while in a somnambulist's trance, she said, he made his way to her room and broke the unnatural promises they had made at the time of their marriage.

The court was in an uproar when Mrs. Russell had finished the story of the sleep-walking husband. The jury sat dumfounded. The spectators gasped. The learned judge was speechless.

Mr. Russell's lawyers suggested that the baby be brought into court and compared with Russell. This motion was denied. Then it was suggested that artists be called in as experts to prove that Russell and the child resembled each other. This, too, was refused.

Finally the jury brought in a verdict of not guilty on the charges of misconduct, but was discreetly noncommittal as to the paternity of the child. So Russell has appealed the case and all its mystifying details will soon be heard again in court.

There have been numberless cases of disputed paternity, especially in the English courts. The most celebrated was the case of Slingsby, in which a blood test is said to have established the paternity.

In San Francisco an Italian woman swore in court that her husband was not the father of her youngest child. He swore that he was. A scientist was called in and made tests which seemed to prove that the blood of child and father was identical. The delicate instrument used to determine this was a machine to register the oscillation of drops of blood suspended by a delicate silk thread.

In another case, a sculptor was utilized to establish similarity of features between child and alleged father. The sculptor showed that the heads of the two were shaped similarly; that the ears were alike; that the eyes resembled each other—that there was no doubt that the defendant was father to the child. In both these instances, the court accepted the testimony of experts as final.

But the case of the Russell "dream baby" which is proving such a difficult mystery for the courts to explain, is the first on record in which a wife has tried to attribute the fatherhood of her baby to her husband's sleep-walking habits.

Scientists who have followed the progress of the Russell case are inclined to doubt the possibility of anything like what pretty Mrs. Russell claims to have been the case. They point to the well known fact that somnambulists are always the lightest of sleepers. If John Hugo Russell had entered his wife's room in his sleep, as she alleges, they think the murmur of his name by her lips or some other unexpected sound would have been almost certain to have aroused him, so that he would have been conscious of what he was doing.

But the unwillingness of the jury in the recent divorce suit to settle the fatherhood of the baby shows what a favorable impression the wife's story must have made, even in the face of science's incredulity. Perhaps never before have a husband and wife sworn with every evidence of sincerity to such conflicting versions of their married life.

Mrs. Russell denied emphatically her husband's charges of misconduct, and then she added:

"I have visited the apartment of Mr. Bradley, but he never made love to me. I have gone to Paris with Mr. Cross, but he never was familiar."

As to the dancing parties, Mrs. Russell said:

"Cross was a divine dancer, and I used to put my head against his cheek when dancing, but that was the fashion then."

Mrs. Russell described her life since her marriage as follows:

"I was married in October, 1918, and was arranged that I should con-

tinued in my employment. There was a compact that we should have no children at first. My letters to my husband were genuine and I was very fond of him.

"I thought that if I married my husband it would prevent my being pestered, as there were many young men worrying me. After marriage some of my husband's personal habits rather repelled me, and his attitude toward my men friends annoyed me."

"He never stood up for himself as a man, and gradually my affections for him decreased. He never said he would give me a shaking or a beating or anything like that. I would have thought more of him if he had, I would have admired him more had he asserted himself."

Lady Amptill, Mr. Russell's mother and one of Queen Mary's ladies-in-waiting, testified as follows:

"It was not until January 24, 1921, that I heard from my son, about his relations with his wife. He was very unhappy and asked for advice."

"About a month later I asked my daughter-in-law why she had not carried out her marriage vows."

"She replied that she had taken those vows with mental reservations and that she had the right to live her own life as she liked. She never for a moment suggested that she lived with my son as his wife."

The testimony of the husband denying that he is the baby's father was of the most positive, the most unequivocal kind.

"Did you read of a child to your wife on October 15, 1921?" his attorney asked.

"I did."

"Are you the father of that child?" "NO!" thundered Mr. Russell.

Very soon now it is expected that another judge and jury will undertake to unravel the tangle of conflicting testimony which makes the "dream baby" such a puzzling mystery, but whether they will be any more successful than was the case in the recent trial is a question.

